

Sparrows that I have seen conform to the paler type of Le Conte eggs. The nest sites and placings are precisely the same.

In manner at nest, I am inclined to believe, (from *very* narrow experience,) that these two sparrows are totally unlike in their reactions. In searching for nests of the Le Conte Sparrow you make your circuits with your drag-rope; and when a bird flushes, you drop the rope quickly, and begin to search about five feet back of where you think the bird left the sea-of-grass. Find it you surely will — if it be there; which it more than likely will be. *Per contra*, when you hear the harsh “crz-z-z-h” of a soaring Nelson Sparrow, you just drop the nail-rake with which you have been dragging-up the dead grass in your search for that nest of the Yellow Rail; and begin to paw grass by the acre. Maybe you will find a nest of Nelson Sparrow, *sometime*; but flush a sitting bird you almost never will. Many a bird will leave the grass before your very feet; and you will paw grass with renewed ferocity. But you will always have just your pawing for your pains. (In other words, I am inclined to believe that the Nelson Sparrow always leaves her nest before an intruder is anywhere near; and that she never leaves the cover until very far away.) Now, will Mr. Abbott be complaisant enough to describe for us, in the pages of the *Wilson Bulletin*, the call of his “ventriloquistic” little friend; and will he send the nest of his finding to some critical student for inspection and verification?

A WINTER INVASION OF JASPER COUNTY, IOWA.

BY J. L. SLOANAKER.¹

Seeing the following paragraph in an early December issue¹ of the *Newton Journal*, I immediately took steps to ascertain the correctness of the report, which read as follows:

PRAIRIE CHICKENS ARE PLENTIFUL ON SKUNK BOTTOM.

“This year has brought along with its other innumerable blessings, a vast number of prairie chickens, such as¹ has not

been seen in this vicinity in years. A few years ago large quantities of these birds were to be found almost at will in this section of the country, but as the community became more thickly settled the prairie chickens migrated to the north, where the country is more open and where, too, large quantities of grain are produced, which is the principal means of sustenance of the prairie chicken.

"But there has been a drought and poor crops in the northwest this year and this may be a possible explanation for the presence of so many chickens in this country again this year."

Having just left a hospital and being unable to take the cold, six-mile drive to the river bottom, I pressed the telephone into service, and was soon in touch with several reliable country friends of mine; and I also interviewed Rev. L. Bright of this city, who frequently hunts in that locality. They all agree that the said territory, that is the south Skunk River valley from Metz to Monroe, Jasper County, Iowa, was literally alive with prairie chickens during the month of December; that flocks of 500 arising from the cornfields were a common sight, and that old residents agree that the birds were more numerous than they had been for the past twenty years. Upon the upland premises near this city, small flocks are more numerous now than usual at this time of year.

The "Journal" is probably right as to the cause of this remarkable state of affairs. The Dakotas are the incubators for the prairie hen family. Here they breed in the long grass of sloughs and swales, and in the tall weeds along fences and roadsides. During harvest they fatten themselves in the broad wheatfields. But for the past two seasons the crops have been terribly short in the Dakotas, as well as in Kansas and Nebraska. The gleanings are insufficient. This forces the birds to migrate towards the south and east, where they naturally follow the many rivers that flow southeast across Iowa, stopping to glean in her many cornfields. So that instead of the usual number of flocks which come to us for the winter, we have them increased tenfold.

In the opinion of many the formerly abundant prairie

chicken is doomed to early extinction. In the summer of 1902 it was the most common bird by far in Aurora County, S. D. On the trip from Sioux City, Iowa, out through Mitchell to Chamberlain, S. D., I estimated that an average of twenty-five birds per mile were flushed by the train from the weeds along the track. The neighboring fields were alive with them. They were eaten by the farmers, both in and out of season. Many will testify as to their abundance in those years when the great land movement was taking place. The influx of hungry settlers, together with an occasional bad season, decimated their ranks; driven from pillar to post, with no friends, and insufficient food,—what else than extinction can be expected?

Among those who hold this view is Mr. F. C. Pellett, of Atlantic, Iowa, who writes me as follows:—

“A few years ago I saw considerable numbers of them in May in North Dakota, but this past summer, during a trip of several hundred miles overland in South Dakota, I was much surprised at the small number of the birds to be seen. The time was August, so that the young birds were mostly fledged and able to fly, and the trip extended over Tripp, Todd, Mellette, Stanley, Washbaugh, and Bennett Counties. Aside from Tripp and Stanley, the country is for the most part open prairie, with sparse settlement, where one would expect to find favorable conditions. Unless ways can be devised of rearing these birds in the domestic state the prairie hen in my opinion is doomed to early extinction.”

I hope that others will report their observations through the columns of the “Bulletin.” An enforced absence from the State during the next few months will prohibit me from learning the results of our strange invasion.

Newton, Iowa, Dec. 28, 1911.